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IDENTICAL LETTERS DATED 23 AUGUST 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF IRAQ TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL AND TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a letter dated 22 August 1999 from Mr. Mohammed Said Al-Sahaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq, which sets out the facts and circumstances relating to the allegations by Kuwait and the United States of America concerning the Indian vessel that was seized by the Kuwaiti authorities. The purpose of those allegations was to undermine the major impact of the UNICEF report which highlighted the substantial rise in the death rate among Iraqi children as a result of the comprehensive blockade which has been imposed on Iraq for over eight years. The Minister requests you to make these facts known to the members of the Security Council.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Saeed H. HASAN
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Identical letters dated 22 August 1999 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq addressed to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council

On 11 August 1999, the Kuwaiti authorities seized an Indian vessel, the Naurani, alleging that it was carrying 250 tons of infant milk, boxes of teats and feeding bottles.

The Government of the Republic of Iraq wishes to state the following facts:

1. The Indian vessel (a launch), the Naurani, was loaded with 75 cartons of talcum powder for babies and 25 cartons of teats and infant feeding bottles of foreign origin.

2. The items mentioned in paragraph 1 above were imported by an Iraqi businessman, Tahsin Mahmud Rastam (private sector), through a businessman in the United Arab Emirates who obtained approval in proper form from the 661 Committee as announced to Agence France-Presse on 19 August 1999.

3. In accordance with Iraqi legislation, imported customs-bonded goods can be released only after laboratory tests had been made to verify that they are in good condition in accordance with standard Iraqi specifications. The goods referred to in paragraph 1 above therefore remained in customs bond in Basra Governorate pending completion of the laboratory tests. When samples of the two items mentioned in paragraph 1 above were tested by the Medicinal and Biological Monitoring Laboratory of the Iraqi Ministry of Health, it was found that they were not in conformity with the standard specifications, and the Ministry of Health requested the importer, the businessman Tahsin Mahmud Rastam, to return the consignment to the supplier in the United Arab Emirates. Accordingly, the items referred to did not enter the Iraqi market at all.

On 11 August 1999, James Rubin, the official spokesman of the United States Department of State, said that Iraq had re-exported infant dried milk powder that had been imported under the oil-for-food and medicines programme. He considered that to be a violation of the unjust blockade imposed on Iraq, and regarded the national leadership of Iraq as being responsible for the suffering of the Iraqi people. As the Office of the Iraq Programme and the Security Council Committee established by resolution 661 (1990) are aware, Iraq did not import baby powder, infant feeding bottles or teats under the Memorandum of Understanding during any of its previous phases and the items that were returned to the supplier were not milk but merely goods imported by the private sector as stated above.

The exploitation of such a commercial operation, which is a well established feature of all commercial exchanges, whether between States, companies or individuals in all States throughout the world, in an immoral manner and for dubious and cheap political motives and publicity, in coordination with the United States Administration, is a desperate attempt to cover up the genocide to which the Iraqi people have been subjected for over

eight years as a result of the continuation of the unjust embargo. Such statements are also desperate attempts to undermine the major impact of the UNICEF report of July 1999 which highlighted the substantial rise in the death rate among Iraqi children as a result of the comprehensive embargo that has been imposed on Iraq for over eight years, and which the United States Administration insists on perpetuating in order to attain dubious political objectives, without regard for the fate of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children.

This campaign of misinformation calls to mind the episode of the children's homes which was fabricated by the former ambassador of the Kuwaiti regime in Washington who employed a United States public relations company to produce a documentary film in which his daughter, Nairah, played the part of a witness. The fabrication of lies is an activity with which the Kuwaiti regime is entirely familiar. Similarly, the United States Administration has always been engaged in spreading misinformation and distorting the truth, a case in point being its transformation of talcum powder for babies into children's dried milk powder.

The Government of the Republic of Iraq condemns and deplores such tendentious fabrications for publicity purposes which are intended to attain dubious political objectives that are known to everyone and asks you to make the facts known to world public opinion and to request the United States Administration to desist from such mendacious publicity campaigns by means of which it is attempting to achieve its private interests to the detriment of the interests, security, sovereignty and independence of the Iraqi people.

(Signed) Mohammed Said AL-SAHAF
Minister for Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Iraq